

Bible Study # 62  
January 8, 1991  
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Life and Letters of Paul Series—II Corinthians

**We are into the book of II Corinthians this evening.** Let's understand a little bit about the background. We have already addressed some of this in our study on I Corinthians. The background of the cities is the same. There is a similarity in terms of the background of the book because they were written within close proximity of one another.

Let's go to Acts 18, 19 and 20 because I think it is good that we **understand how we can date some of these particular books.** Last time we saw that Paul had remained in Corinth for about eighteen months (Acts 18:11). Then, verse 21, he was anxious to keep the Feast in Jerusalem. This would have been the Feast of Tabernacles 52 A.D. He left so as to arrive in Jerusalem in time for the fall festival. He landed at Caesarea, went up ("up" is an expression referring to going to Jerusalem) and saluted the Church and then, verse 22, went back down to Antioch.

He spent some time there. He would have, undoubtedly, been wintering there. Normally, winter was a difficult time to travel either overland or by sea. The weather became more unpredictable and traveling was more difficult, so he stayed in Antioch. Antioch was sort of Paul's headquarters of the Gentile work. He wintered there the winter of 52 A.D.—53 A.D.

Then, Acts 18:23, we find that he left and went on his third evangelistic journey. He traveled through what is modern-day Syria and went up into ancient Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). He began to go overland through the peninsula, going through Galatia and that area, and then headed west toward the coast of Asia Minor. Over a period of time, he worked his way through and came to Ephesus, which was on the coast.

He found certain disciples there, and we find, Acts 19:8, he continued in the synagogues speaking there for three months. He arrived in Ephesus somewhere between Passover and Pentecost. If he left overland as soon as traveling became permissible, it would have probably been in the very early spring, maybe the end of February or the first of March. He probably spent March, April and May (about three months) working his way through to Ephesus. He wasn't in a giant hurry, trying to go straight through. He was staying in the various Churches for a week

or two, preaching and spending some time, working his way across. The implication is that he was in Ephesus until around Pentecost (latter part of May). He stayed there three months, which would coincide with the summer.

Verse 9, we find that he rented a school. We're not the first ones to rent a school for services. Paul rented a school that was nearby because they kicked him out and wouldn't let him keep speaking in the synagogue.

Verse 10, he went next door, utilized this school and continued there about two years. This would be from the late summer or early fall of 53 A.D. to the beginning of fall of 55 A.D. that he stayed in Ephesus. Acts 19 describes various things that were going on.

We saw last time that he wrote I Corinthians from Ephesus. We dated it to the Passover season of 55 A.D., which would have been about six months before he left Ephesus. Because of the references that are there, we find that Paul ran into problems.

Verses 21-40, there wound up being a riot that broke out in Ephesus and there was quite a bit of difficulty.

Acts 20:1-3, "After the uproar had ceased, Paul called the disciples to him, embraced them, and departed to go to Macedonia. Now when he had gone over that region and encouraged them with many words, he came to Greece and stayed three months. [This would coincide with winter. Undoubtedly, he wintered in the area of Greece.] And when the Jews plotted against him as he was about to sail to Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia."

He had intended to sail directly from Greece back to Antioch, but when he found out there was a plot to assassinate him if he had taken the boat, he decided to retrace his steps overland to go back to Macedonia.

Macedonia is northern Greece. That's where Philippi is. If you have a map, you may find it easier to follow by consulting that. Otherwise, it can get a little bit difficult going from this city to that city (all these places) and it kind of jumbles up.

He went to Ephesus, which is on the coast. He crossed over the straits (we call it the Dardanelle) into northern Greece (what was anciently called Macedonia) to the city of Philippi. He started up in northern Greece and worked his way down through Greece into Greece proper, which is the area where Corinth is. He spent about three months there. Undoubtedly, he wintered there the winter of 55 A.D.—56 A.D. Then he was going to return

directly to Jerusalem by sailing a direct route, but when word reached him that there was an assassination plot, he decided he would just retrace his steps. So, he went back overland up to Philippi.

Verse 6, “But we sailed away from Philippi after the Days of Unleavened Bread....” He had wintered down in Corinth (the southern part of Greece), retraced his steps during the month of March and worked his way up to Philippi, stopping and preaching in several Churches on the Sabbath along the way. He spent a short time in Philippi. Then it was time for the Passover, so he stayed for the Days of Unleavened Bread and then left.

Verse 16, he caught a boat that was taking him back to Jerusalem in order to reach Jerusalem for Pentecost. This was the Days of Unleavened Bread and the Feast of Pentecost in 56 A.D.

We saw that he had written I Corinthians during the Passover season of 55 A.D. from Ephesus. When he wrote I Corinthians, he sent Timothy to check things out.

In II Corinthians 1:1, Timothy has rejoined Paul. There are a couple of things to date it.

In Acts 20:1-2, we are told that Paul left Ephesus and went to Macedonia and worked his way down by land into Greece.

I Corinthians 16:5-6, “Now I will come to you when I pass through Macedonia (for I am passing through Macedonia). But it may be that I will remain, or even spend the winter with you....”

Verse 8, “But I will tarry in Ephesus until Pentecost.” He stayed on until a little while after Pentecost. It was hard to break loose from Ephesus, but he did. A riot broke out and that solved the problem of when to leave Ephesus. This was his plan when he wrote I Corinthians.

II Corinthians 1:1, we find, “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother....” Timothy was with him at that particular time.

Acts 19:21, what we had seen earlier, “...Paul purposed in the Spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem....” That was what he told the Corinthians. He planned to go to Philippi, come down to Achaia (Corinth was the capital of the province of Achaia) and then go to Jerusalem.

Verse 22, while he was still in Ephesus, “So he sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus, but he himself stayed in Asia for a time.”

He wrote I Corinthians shortly thereafter. He sent Timothy and Erastus over there to follow

up. He wrote the Corinthians a letter. Remember in I Corinthians, he really “chewed them up one side and down the other.” He told them he was going to visit. In fact, he was going to spend the winter there because he thought it was going to take more than one week. He was going to utilize the help and the financial resources from there to take him on his journey further. It was a relatively wealthy area. Putting it together with Acts 19, we find that he had sent Timothy on before, and he stayed in Asia for a while. Then there was a riot that came up and there were problems.

Acts 20:1, “After the uproar had ceased, Paul called the disciples to him, embraced them, and departed to go to Macedonia.”

Now when we get to II Corinthians, we find that Timothy has rejoined Paul because Paul mentions Timothy in the salutation in II Corinthians 1:1. Paul is in Ephesus and he writes I Corinthians. A little while later he dispatches Timothy. Then he, himself, leaves Ephesus that summer and goes on over to Macedonia. When he gets to Macedonia, he meets Timothy. Timothy comes and reports to him. He tells him how his letter was received in Corinth and brings him up to date on the situation. Paul then writes II Corinthians from Philippi, the area where he is. He has to dispatch it. He tells them in II Corinthians that he is coming to them. He is planning on coming to where they were.

II Corinthians 9:1-2, “Now concerning the ministering to the saints [the offering taken up for the Jerusalem Church] it is superfluous for me to write to you; for I know your willingness, about which I boast of you to the Macedonians....” Paul says, ‘I am bragging about you up here in Macedonia. I have “laid it on pretty thick.”’

Verses 3-4, “Yet I have sent the brethren, lest our boasting of you should be in vain in this respect, that, as I said, you may be ready; lest if some Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we (not to mention you!) should be ashamed of this confident boasting.”

Paul says, ‘You had better really do well because if some of those from Macedonia come with me, you are going to be embarrassed if we get down there and you have some little paltry offering.’

Corinth was probably the wealthiest city in Greece. They were capable of doing more than any of the other places. But the reality was that some of the poorer Churches, such as Philippi, were really the ones who were giving sacrificially. In Corinth, they wanted to keep what they had. Paul was trying to stir them up a

little bit because he knew that they had a tendency to be a little selfish. He was using a little psychology in the right way to embarrass them into doing what they should do.

When we put it together, it is pretty clear that Paul wrote II Corinthians a matter of a few months after I Corinthians. Paul wrote I Corinthians during Passover season 55 A.D. He probably wrote II Corinthians at the end of the summer or, let's say, the early fall of 55 A.D.—about six months later. Then, after he wrote, he worked his way down through Greece, arriving in Corinth perhaps a couple of months after he had written the letter. If he wrote the letter in what we would term early September, spent the fall festivals there in Philippi, worked his way down through the rest of Greece the remainder of October and November, then he would arrive in Corinth about December—and that's where he wintered. It gives a little bit of an idea.

Acts 20:1-6, he went back up to Macedonia, stayed through the Days of Unleavened Bread of 56 A.D.

Verse 16, he sailed from Macedonia back to Jerusalem in time to be there for Pentecost 56 A.D. That's where he was arrested. It gives us a little bit of a feel for the time flow when we put Acts together with these epistles.

**As we look into II Corinthians itself, Paul has to address several things that seem to be major issues.** Paul spends a lot of time in I Corinthians defending and emphasizing his apostolic authority. Why did he do that? Obviously, it was because it was being challenged. We tend to make an issue of those things that are challenged. In his letter to some of the other Churches, he doesn't make that nearly the issue. We will notice as we go through II Corinthians the fact that he was an apostle.

It reminds me of some of the things that we confronted in the Church around 1979, 80 and 81. For those who have been in the Church for a number of years and have a perspective, you realize Mr. Herbert Armstrong laid emphasis on Church government and his apostolic authority in a way he had never done in the 60s and early 70s (particularly in the 60s) because it was not an issue at that time. He virtually never raised the point in the 60s because nobody ever questioned it. The issue had to be made when it was questioned. When the state of California tried to come in and take over in some of these things, then the issue needed to be made. How does God work? Through whom is he working? –Things of that sort.

That's what Paul was doing here in Corinth. There were, obviously, some people who were seeking to challenge and undermine Paul's authority. 'Who does he think he is, telling us these things?' They were seeking in some way to put down and demean his authority.

*We find in II Corinthians that Paul spends a fair amount of time emphasizing his office in a way that you don't find him doing in the book of Ephesians or Philippians. II Corinthians and Galatians stand out as the epistles where you know that Paul was under attack in Galatia and Corinth. There were people who were seeking to undermine his credibility and his claim to authority. Some, perhaps, did it in more subtle ways, others overtly. There were various motives that came in.*

**First** he spends some time emphasizing his apostolic authority. **Second**, he also is involved in making the decision to re-admit this fornicator to fellowship. This individual by this time had repented; fruits of repentance had been evidenced. The issue came up as to what should occur. Paul explained it, and he was re-admitted into fellowship (II Corinthians 2:6-11).

**Third**, II Corinthians 1:15-17, he also had to explain why he had been unable personally to come to Corinth. He had intended to come to Corinth earlier than what he had. Originally, he had told them that he was going to stay in Ephesus until Pentecost and then he was going to come. When you put it together with Acts, you find out that he stayed longer than Pentecost. He pretty well stayed the summer. There were other things that came up. Some were saying he never intended to come. Since people had their various attitudes and accusations, he had to explain why he had not been able to get there earlier. It was not something that he had just lightly said, but there were other things that came up. Sometimes there are matters that arise in terms of fulfilling the responsibilities that he had.

**Fourth**, II Corinthians 8:1-24—9:1-15, he also wanted to again lay emphasis on the collection for Jerusalem that he was taking up because he was going to transport it with him when he went to Jerusalem. His original intent had been to sail directly out of the port of Cenchrea there at Corinth. As it was, he went overland back up to Macedonia and sailed out from there (Acts 20:1-16).

As we go through II Corinthians 1, we find that Paul mentions why he had been unable to come.

II Corinthians 1:15-17, "And in this confidence I intended to come to you before, that you might have a second benefit—to pass by way of you to

Macedonia to you, and be helped by you on my way to Judea. Therefore, when I was planning this, did I do it lightly?...” Paul says, ‘I intended to do that. My intent was to sail out of Ephesus and come to Corinth. I intended to come see you first and then go up to Macedonia. I was going to come back and winter with you and then sail out. That was my intent, but I obviously haven’t done that.’ He is writing to them from Macedonia. ‘By now you realize my plans have changed. Some of you are saying that I never intended to come anyway.’

Verse 17, continuing, “...Or the things I plan, do I plan according to the flesh, that with me there should be Yes, Yes, and No, No?”

He says, ‘Was I fickle in my promise? No, that’s not true. I make my plans, but I am a human being. Sometimes there are things that occur over which I am powerless that change those plans.’

Verses 18-20, ‘You were preached to; Silas and Timothy came. God is consistent and He can keep His promises, whether we may have to change our plans or not.’

Verse 23, in fact, he tells them, “Moreover I call God as witness against my soul, that to spare you I came no more to Corinth.” He says, ‘I was still pretty “steamed” from what I wrote in I Corinthians, and I decided I would give you a little longer to get this thing straightened out. I decided to spare you.’ It gave Timothy a chance to meet up with him in Macedonia and report back to him as to what was going on before he decided to go down there.

II Corinthians 1:21-22, “Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a deposit.” KJV, “who has also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.”

There are a couple of things we are told here about the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the means by which we are sealed and it is the earnest of the Spirit.

It’s important to understand those two things. A “seal” is that which authenticates genuineness. If you have a legal document, you may get it notarized. One of the things the notary does is he affixes his seal to that document. You can feel that raised seal. The purpose of that is to authenticate genuineness. That’s what the notary does. He is authenticating that this is the genuine article. He is authenticating that the individual named on the document really did sign it. That seal is the mark of authenticity. In ancient times, it was very common that kings and rulers wore a

special signet ring, a ring that had their seal. Today we use the same principle—the notary seal, the seal of the United States or the seal of the State of Louisiana that is affixed to official documents. Many times you may have to get a copy of something, and it has to be a notarized copy. You can’t just go in and give them any old Xerox copy. They want one that has that notary seal.

God’s Spirit seals us. It authenticates that we are the genuine article. It is the means by which we are sealed. We are authenticated as being God’s people. It identifies us. God’s Spirit seals us and it is also the earnest of our inheritance. We use that term.

If you bought a house, one of the things you did when you made a proposal (if you wanted that property taken off the market), you put earnest money. You put a small portion to prove that you really intended to come back and pay the whole thing. You made a promise and gave them something to demonstrate that you were earnest that you really meant it.

God’s Spirit is the earnest [guarantee] of our inheritance (Ephesians 1:14). It is, in that sense, the evidence and the proof that God really is going to transform our mortal bodies into a spirit body. God, in giving us His Spirit, sets us apart. He authenticates us as the genuine thing, a real Christian. What’s the proof (the evidence) that somebody is a real Christian? The Spirit of God is the proof.

Romans 8:9, “...Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His.”

Verse 11, “But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who [which] dwells in you.”

In II Corinthians 1:22, we are told that the Spirit seals us and Ephesians 1:14 tells us it is the earnest.

Paul then goes on and talks about the fact that the correction he had given had been motivated by love.

II Corinthians 2:4, “For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you, with many tears, not that you should be grieved, but that you might know the love which I have so abundantly for you.” He was concerned for them. Too many times people have the misconception that there is love and there is discipline. If somebody is viewed as being a disciplinarian, that means they don’t have a lot of love. Paul had a tremendous amount of love. The discipline that Paul imposed on the Corinthian Church and

on this individual who was living in sin was motivated by love.

Hebrew 12:6, “For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.” If God doesn’t chasten us, it’s because He doesn’t claim us. That’s what it says in Hebrews.

Verse 8, you’re not sons; you’re illegitimate. God doesn’t claim you.

The point is that Paul was motivated by love. He cared too much for them to just let them drift into the lake of fire without trying to shake them up and wake them up.

Now word had reached him. Evidently, Timothy had told him that this man who had been singled out in I Corinthians 5 had, over a period of months, really demonstrated a marked change.

II Corinthians 2:6-8, “This punishment which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man, so that, on the contrary, you ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him.”

Verse 11, “lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.” Here, the point is made that this individual had learned a lesson and had repented. Paul said, ‘Now that he has repented, receive him back with open arms.’ Judgment and mercy are fundamental issues.

In Matthew 23:23, Jesus said that those two, together with faith, are the weightier matters of the law. Judgment has to do with drawing proper distinctions. Judgment and mercy—the two go hand-in-hand. The balance between the two is very crucial.

So many times people don’t understand the balance. The Corinthians, on the one hand, had been doling out mercy when judgment was called for. When you dole out mercy when judgment is called for, then what you’re really doing is turning grace into license. That’s what they had done and that’s what Paul had rebuked them for in I Corinthians 5. They were allowing this to just go on. Nobody did anything and the situation continued. Here was an individual just openly living in sin. It was common knowledge in the congregation and it was just accepted. Their concept of love was much distorted.

On the other hand, when an individual learns his lesson and repents, then his past is not to be held over him. He doesn’t go through life having to drag his past like a ball and chain after him.

Too many times people want to show mercy when they should show judgment. If discipline is

imposed on somebody, they feel sorry for them and want to miserate with them. They say, ‘You surely got a raw deal.’

Then, on the other hand, somebody repents and they come back. People kind of view him and think, ‘You’ve been gone for a while; wonder what you did?’ Then they want to gossip about him, judge him and wonder whether he’s repented. ‘He says he’s repented, but how do I know?’ –This sort of attitude.

There’s the wrong kind of mercy extended when judgment should be imposed; then there’s judgment (the wrong kind) imposed when mercy should be extended. That’s backward and it’s an important concept for us to understand. The whole purpose of judgment, whether it is directly visited by God or whether it is in the context of Church discipline, is for the purpose of bringing an individual to repentance so that mercy can be extended. God desires to extend mercy, but mercy is available to those who repent. God does not extend His mercy and forgiveness in a way that is going to perpetuate us in our sins. That wouldn’t be love. That would just serve to confirm us in a way of life that is destructive and painful.

Paul is now addressing the issue. If the man repents, receive him back lest he should be swallowed up over much sorrow. Now that he has really come to see it, he really hates the whole thing and has deeply repented. You need to encourage him because the tendency is for the pendulum to swing. The guy can become discouraged and depressed and just feel like this is so bad and terrible that God will never forgive him and he can never look anybody in the eye again. This is just horrible. He becomes all discouraged and is ready to give up.

We don’t want Satan to get an advantage with us. We are not ignorant of his devices. Satan can take advantage either way. A person can be swallowed up over much sorrow. They can become so depressed and overwhelmed by a sense of guilt as to become deeply depressed and discouraged. Satan can take advantage of that and pull a person down. On the other hand, a person can have a flippant, casual attitude toward sin and treat it in a very cavalier fashion and go “sailing” right along. That’s not good. Either way takes us to destruction. There is an appropriate balance to learn. Paul is seeking to teach the Corinthians and, through this letter, to also teach us.

II Corinthians 3:1, “Do we begin again to commend ourselves? Or do we need, as some

others, epistles of commendation to you or letters of commendation from you?"

Some were asking, 'How do we really know that Paul has all of the authority that he says, and that he's really an apostle? Have you ever seen any proof or any evidence of that? What credentials did he have to prove that? Have you ever seen any letters signed by James and Peter? How do you know?' Somebody was evidently coming into Corinth saying that and trying to "stir things up."

Paul said, 'Do I need that kind of thing? Do you want to know what my credentials are?'

Verses 2-3, "You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; you are manifestly an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart."

He said, 'You want proof? The fact that you exist as a Church is proof of what God has done through me because it's through me you heard the gospel. It's through me that the Church was raised up. You received God's Spirit, either through the laying on of my hands or other people on whom I have laid hands.'

It's a very apt comparison to those who wanted to challenge Mr. Herbert Armstrong back several years ago. The very existence of the Church, the institution, the knowledge and the things that we had came directly or indirectly as the result of God's work through him.

Someone in the Church wanted to ask, 'Where are your credentials?' Well, Paul says, 'The fact that you exist as a Church, that you have God's Holy Spirit and the fact of your conversion is proof that God has worked through me. Because if God hasn't worked through me, how did you learn the truth, how did you become converted, and where did you get God's Spirit? Either I taught you, baptized you and laid hands on you or someone I taught, taught you, baptized you and laid hands on you. You are my epistle. What more do I need? I don't just have something written by ink. I have something written with the Holy Spirit.'

II Corinthians 5:1, "For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." We will age and eventually break down and die.

Verse 2, "For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven." He didn't say that we are going to heaven to get it. He is going to come and His reward is with Him.

Revelation 22:12, "'And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work.'" Eternal life is what He is going to bring. We look forward to that.

As we go through trials, difficulties and adversities and as our body begins to "grind down" and to decay, we begin to recognize how temporary it is. We begin to earnestly desire to be clothed with something permanent. When you're young and think you have all the energy in the world, you figure you are going to last forever and you don't see the point. But as the years pass, we all become more and more convinced; those who are older among us are more convinced of that need. That's just a part of it. God has designed that to make us more and more deeply aware of how temporary and transitory we are and how much we need what He has to give.

II Corinthians 5:4, "...that mortality may be swallowed up by life."

Verse 7, "For we walk by faith, not by sight."

Hebrew 11:1, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Faith and sight sometimes contradict one another. Faith is based on what God says, what He promises. Sight is based on physical evidence, what you see. If you have to make a choice in believing what God says or what you see, which do you choose?

We look around at the world; the things we see around us look pretty firm, strong and substantial. God says this world, this orderly arrangement of things, is going to pass from the scene and a new age is going to come. There will be a new world order, and it will not be one that President Bush or Gorbachev put together. That is not the new world order that is going to come about. The real new world order that is going to come about is the one that Jesus Christ brings about. The devil may try to run his counterfeit; in fact, he is. It's called Mystery Babylon the Great. That's the counterfeit of the new world order. But the real new world order is the fact that Christ is going to return and He is going to establish it.

What's the evidence, the proof? The evidence that Christ is going to return isn't based on scientific evidence that you can measure, taste and feel. It's based on the promises of God. We walk by faith, not by sight. As a Christian, we have to live our lives predicated on faith, on what God says. We either believe God or we don't. We deepen our relationship with Him as we walk with Him. If we walk with Him and

spend time with Him, we deepen our relationship with Him.

II Corinthians 5:14-15, “For the love of Christ constrains us, because we judge thus; that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live not longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.” Christ died and gave Himself for us. When we recognize that, our lives need to be devoted to Him.

Verse 17, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” We don’t want the old man and the old way. We become a new creature and old things have passed away. You don’t want to go back or drift back into the things you got rid of, put away and stopped when you came into the Church. You don’t want to drift back into the things of the world. We want to go forward in newness of life. We want to be a new creature, not drift back into the world or never come out of the world. Recognize that a new creature has to do with a whole new set of priorities, a new set of values and a new set of what’s important to us.

Verse 18, “Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.” Understand where the reconciliation is. We are being reconciled to God; it doesn’t say that God becomes reconciled to us. There’s a difference.

When you get a bank statement, you can go through and reconcile your checkbook to the bank statement. You better do it the right way. If you start reconciling the bank statement to your checkbook, you may wind up in trouble. The bank really won’t be impressed with that.

Reconciliation done the wrong way won’t do anybody any good. God is reconciling us to Himself through Jesus Christ. He didn’t say He would become reconciled to us—‘I guess you’re never going to change, so I will just adapt to you.’ God says ‘no,’ and God is right. Now the bank may occasionally make a mistake, but God doesn’t even occasionally make a mistake. God never needs to be reconciled to us. We always need to be reconciled to Him. He is the standard, and we have to become reconciled to Him. We have to come to match Him, to be brought into harmony with Him. We can be brought into harmony with God through Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ makes possible our being brought from a state of disharmony into a state of harmony with God. We have the ministry of reconciliation.

Verse 19, “that is, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself...”

Verse 20, “Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ...”

Verse 21, “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” He paid the penalty to make possible our reconciliation to God. The whole purpose of God reconciling us to Himself is to change and transform us to make us like Him, so it is important that we understand the concept of reconciliation and what it means. It is not that God says He will meet us halfway or that God is going to water down His standards. If we surrender to Him, God makes it possible for us to be brought into harmony with Him. That’s what He desires in our behalf.

II Corinthians 6:1, “We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain.” God extends His mercy. Don’t receive it in vain; use it for a good purpose.

He begins to talk about being unequally yoked together and about our relationships. He talks about our relationship with God and how that renewed relationship is made possible. Then he begins to talk about our relationship with society around.

Verse 14, “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?” —“Yoking together.” Primarily oxen were yoked. Why were animals yoked together?

Some of us are familiar with horses or mules being hitched up. You would have a wagon pulled by two or maybe four. When you look at the way animals are harnessed together, it is so that they have to pull together. If they are not tied together, then one can go in one direction and one can go the other. Any mules I have known, that is exactly what they would do.

What if you have two creatures that are vastly unequal? In the Old Testament, they were told not to yoke an oxen and an ass together (Deuteronomy 22:10). You have a tremendous amount of disparity. When two creatures are yoked together, the larger the disparity, the more difficult it is for them to pull together. They can’t pull together on the load. Animals that are different sizes have different steps. One has a big step, the other a short step. And there is disparity in strength. It’s just a problem. It is never going to work well. It’s going to be difficult and will be hardship on both.

God utilized a physical principle that He gave to ancient Israel, but there was a spiritual lesson

that was intended when He said that an oxen and an ass couldn't be yoked together. It wasn't just because God was concerned about donkeys and oxen, though obviously, His tender mercies are over all His works as we are told in Psalm 145:9. God is certainly concerned about the physical creation and the animals, but His primary concern was the fact that there are spiritual lessons and implications. If God gave instructions even for animals, there were principles that applied to people.

When He said the ox and the ass shouldn't be yoked together, it had to do with trying to tie together, to pull together through life, something with great disparity. You want to be able to pull together, so anything that involves the need to pull together, you make a mistake to yoke up with someone who is not going to be pulling in the same direction. There isn't any way you can pull together.

The principle would apply to business partnerships, marriage and various things. In some cases, people find themselves in circumstances as they come into the knowledge of the truth. They are already yoked in a way that is unequal. Sometimes people have to make the best of a situation. But the principle is that if you're not yoked, don't seek an unequal yoking. Seek an equal yoking, a yoking that is going to enable people to pull together. Two working together—when they are really pulling together—can accomplish far more than either individually. Two working together can more than double what either individually can do because it consolidates and maximizes that effort.

Verse 17, "Therefore 'Come out from among them and be separate....'"

Verse 16, "And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God...." There is a relationship here.

II Corinthians 7:1, "Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." We are to go forward and become like God. We're to recognize the importance of partnerships in any sort of thing.

Verses 8-10, Paul begins to address the issue of repentance and the fact that there are two different types of sorrow. Being sorry and being repentant are two totally different things. Being repentant is different than being sorry. There are two different kinds of being sorry. One of them leads to repentance, the other doesn't. Even godly sorrow is not repentance of and by itself. It

leads to repentance. There is worldly sorrow and godly sorrow. Worldly sorrow works death. It is a one-way street.

I think that the clearest illustration or example that I know to illustrate the difference between godly sorrow and worldly sorrow is the response of Peter and Judas. Judas betrayed Christ. When he realized that they were actually going to go through the crucifixion, he was sorry. He even took the money back (Matthew 27:3-5). But it was a worldly sorrow. Whatever idea he had in mind didn't work out that way. He became despondent, went out and committed suicide. That was worldly sorrow.

On the other hand, Peter denied Christ three different times.

Matthew 26:75, when the cock crowed and what he had done dawned on him, Peter felt horrible. His sorrow was a godly sorrow because it produced a change in his life.

With worldly sorrow, any time you get into trouble it's easy to be sorry. Ever notice that? From the time you were a little kid, any time you got caught, you're sorry—sorry you got caught. That's normal and that's natural—sorry for the penalty, consequences and sorry we're in trouble. Sometimes we're sorry and wish we hadn't done this or that.

But godly sorrow goes beyond that. Godly sorrow is not just sorry for the consequences. It is not even that you wish you hadn't done this or that particular thing. It's a sorrow for what we are on the inside. We have come to see ourselves. Godly sorrow produces repentance.

It enumerates the qualities of godly sorrow.

II Corinthians 7:11, "For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter."

"Diligence" (KJV, "carefulness") is a desire to really be careful. We have confronted sin in its enormity. We don't want to cut right along the edge anymore. We don't want to live kind of skirting the edge of the cliff.

"Clearing of yourselves" is a desire to have the guilt cleared away, which means we go to God and we confess it.

I John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." The way to clear yourself is not to make excuses and use self-justification. It is to admit it to God; go to Him

and really acknowledge it and ask God to clear it away.

“Indignation” is really being stirred up and indignant when we see sin for what it is. We are stirred up about it.

“Fear” is reverence and awe for God.

“Vehement desire” is a yearning and earnest desire to do what’s right and that earnest yearning for more of God’s truth. We are told by Peter in I Peter 2:2 to desire the sincere milk of the word just like a newborn baby. Have a craving for more of God’s way.

“Zeal” is really being stirred up, really being on fire.

“Vindication” (KJV, “revenge”) means, literally, “an avenging of wrong.” In the context, it would be best understood as making restitution. In this context, it doesn’t mean going and doing something to somebody. We recognize that we are the one who has done something wrong. We avenge the wrong and make it right—a desire to make restitution.

You might look at an example. Remember Zacchus, the publican?

Luke 19:2-8, he was a little short guy who wanted to see Jesus and climbed up a sycamore tree so he could get a good view. Jesus saw him and told him to come down. ‘I am coming over to your house to eat, so you had better get down out of the tree so you can “beat it on over there.”’ Jesus talked with him. Zacchus told Him that he really saw what he had done and the way he misused his office. He was willing to give half of what he had to the poor. Anybody that he cheated, he was going to make restitution to them plus “square things up.” He evidenced the qualities that are shown right here in II Corinthians 7:11. One of the things Zacchus did that convinced Jesus that he was really repentant was this attitude.

Luke 19:9, when he got through telling Christ what he was going to do, Christ said, “...‘Today salvation has come to this house....’” What if Zacchus had said, ‘I know I’ve been a crook; I know I have cheated a lot of people. But I tell You what, why don’t we just have kind of a clean slate? I will quit cheating people, but I get to keep everything that I have stolen so far. Can I cut a deal with You? Would you okay it if I quit cheating and stealing from people, but I get to keep everything I have stolen? We will call it even.’ What do you think Jesus would have said? Do you think Christ would have been really impressed and said, ‘Zacchus, you really have the big picture’? Somehow I don’t see Jesus

having been really impressed with that sort of an attitude.

It’s kind of like in the Old Testament—if you stole a sheep from your brother or neighbor, you couldn’t just come and offer a sacrifice. You had to make restitution for the sheep (Exodus 22:1-4). If you defrauded your neighbor, you couldn’t just go to the priest and say, ‘I really cheated that guy. I’m sorry, let me offer a sacrifice and we will call it even.’ No. You need to offer the sacrifice, that’s right, but first you go and get reconciled to your neighbor. You give him back those cattle you rustled. You can’t just keep his herd, offer one of them to square you up with God and keep all the rest. You have to make restitution. It was evidence of repentance. Repentance has to do with a changed direction. Christ brought this out.

II Corinthians 7:6-9, Paul said, ‘You have evidenced that you don’t just have worldly sorrow. Titus has told me that there has been some real change [fruits] that has taken place. I see that there have been some significant changes, and I’m very glad of that. I’m not glad I made you sorry. I don’t like to be corrective and I’m sorry that I had to do it, but I’m not sorry that you’ve changed.

I think that any of us as parents can understand what Paul meant by that. I don’t think any of us enjoy having to be sternly corrective to our children. Sometimes you really feel badly; on the one hand, you had to be corrective. Yet on the other, you’re not sorry because you know that they needed it. You just feel badly that you had to. That’s the way Paul was. He felt badly that he had to, but he wasn’t sorry for the results. He now finds some change.

In II Corinthians 8, he begins to address the subject of giving and the example of the people in Macedonia.

II Corinthians 8:5, “And this they did, not as we had hoped, but first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God.” That’s what God desires. God doesn’t want what we have; He wants us.

Verse 12, “For if there is first a willing mind....” The issue with God is not nearly so much the amount as it is the attitude. God wants us to develop His nature, His attitude of giving and helping and sharing.

II Corinthians 9:1-4, “Now concerning the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you; for I know your willingness, about which I boast of you to the Macedonians, that Achaia was ready a year ago; and your zeal has stirred up the majority. Yet I have sent the

brethren, lest our boasting of you should be in vain in this respect, that, as I said, you may be ready; lest if some Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we (not to mention you!) should be ashamed of this confident boasting.” Paul said, ‘Some Macedonians are probably going to come with me, and we don’t want to find you unprepared.’

Verse 5, “Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren to go to you ahead of time....” He’s on his way and this is going to be taken up.

Verses 5-7, he talks about giving and God loving a cheerful giver.

This was a big issue in Corinth. The Corinthians were able to do a lot. They were a very wealthy area, but the tendency so many times in areas that have a lot of material things is that the people can be pretty possessive and covetous of that. They needed to use what God had given them as a blessing, rather than to have the attitude they tended to have.

II Corinthians 10 continues to address certain issues with them.

Verses 3-5, he talks about changing and casting down imaginations (arguments).

He talks about the fact that he’s not going to get in a “match” with some.

II Corinthians 10:12, “For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.” We’re not out to do that.

II Corinthians 11:2, “For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.”

He is concerned.

Verses 3-4, “But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you may well put up with it.”

Verses 13-14, “For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light.”

You have several things going on. You have those, even in the time of the New Testament, who were clearly false apostles. Simon Magus and those who were in league with him, those

who were seeking to subvert a congregation to their own use, were clearly false apostles. They claimed an office they never had. The heresies that sprang from them ultimately developed into what became the Catholic Church.

There were others who had various brands of heresies. All of the heretics who gave Paul problems were not necessarily united in perfect order. There was a certain amount of confusion. There were certain brands of heresies that converged in Rome that became the basis of the teachings of the church at Rome. The teachings of the church at Rome ultimately became the standard brand of “Christianity” that Constantine enforced throughout the Roman Empire. There were various groups and various ones who had their “axe to grind.” They were seeking, for whatever their reasons, to make comments about Paul.

Verses 13-15, he talked about the fact that there were going to be false ministers, those who were in reality ministers of Satan but don’t show up claiming that. The devil doesn’t show up wearing a little red suit, a pitchfork and a sign around his neck saying, “I’m the devil and I’m here to deceive you.” He appears as an angel of light. He claims to be that which he is not. That’s always the way of it. Paul addresses a little bit of his credentials and some of his background in the latter part of chapter 11.

In II Corinthians 12, he deals with a vision of heaven that he had. He tells it in the third person.

II Corinthians 12:1, “It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord.” It is not something that he wants to focus attention on him in a wrong way. This would have been to address the subject of a vision.

Verse 2, “I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago....” If Paul was writing in the fall of 55 A.D., 14 years earlier would have been the fall of 41 A.D. It’s interesting that this would have been only a few months before he entered the ministry. Paul had been sent back to Tarsus after his conversion and time in Arabia. The apostles basically sent him back home to Tarsus. They told him to go back, get a job and go to work. “Don’t call us, we’ll call you.” He stayed there for four years. Barnabas went and sought him out and brought him down to Antioch to assist him. That was in 42 A.D. The timing of this vision would have been, maybe, just a few months prior to that. You think maybe God, in preparation for the job he had ahead for Paul, wanted to encourage him because Paul had to learn patience waiting for God to work

through His government. The timing on this would have been just very shortly before Paul entered the ministry.

Verse 2, continuing, "...whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught up to the third heaven." God gave him this vision of the third heaven.

The Bible speaks of three heavens. The heaven of the earth's atmosphere—scripture talks about the clouds of heaven or the birds that fly in the midst of heaven. Heaven can be used just to refer to the earth's atmosphere. Sometimes it is used to refer to outer space—the stars of heaven. That would be the second heaven. The third heaven is the heaven of God's throne. So, there are three different heavens. The term "heaven" can be used in different ways. It depends on the context. God created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1). The implication is referring to the stars, sun, moon, all that, along with the third.

Paul mentions a thorn in the flesh that he had.

II Corinthians 12:7, "And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure." He had this revelation, but God didn't want him to get puffed up. Even though he had a very special relationship with God, there was a particular thorn in the flesh. We are not told what it was. It was something that he felt really hindered him.

Verses 8-9, on three specific occasions he really sought God with prayer and fasting; God never chose to remove that particular problem. It was something Paul needed to learn to live with through God's help. Sometimes God removes the problem. Sometimes He gives us the grace and the strength to survive through it.

Verse 13, "For what is it in which you were inferior to other churches, except that I myself was not burdensome to you? Forgive me this wrong!" In other words, Paul had not taken wages of Corinth previously, though he planned to do so. He had said earlier that he was going to come to them and let them bring him on his way back to Antioch. In other words, he would do so when he came. But he had not done so previously in the time that he had been in Corinth earlier because money had been such an issue. He allowed the money to be used there locally in Corinth; he did not take a wage from them while he was there. Paul said, 'How have you been inferior to other Churches? The only way I treated you any differently than the

others is I didn't collect a salary from you. Forgive me.'

He may, by this time, have had some second thoughts and felt that maybe he was too gentle with them to begin with. It maybe gave way to some of the problems that had developed. He had allowed all the funds to be utilized there locally and not taken any of it. He had either worked or received supplies and sustenance from the Churches in Macedonia while he had been in Corinth. Now he makes allusion to that.

We have already seen why he wrote II Corinthians. In chapters 3, 11 and 12, we found Paul defending his apostleship.

In II Corinthians 3:1-3, he talks about what commendations do we need; what credentials do we need? You are our credentials.

In II Corinthians 11, he talks about false apostles and all the things he had gone through in the latter part of the chapter.

In II Corinthians 12, he continues that same theme, defending his apostleship. That's one reason he wrote the book. II Corinthians 2:5-11, the second reason he wrote the book was to reinstate the repentant sinner who had been disfellowshipped in I Corinthians 5.

In II Corinthians 8 and 9, he dealt with the collection for the saints in Jerusalem. This was the third reason he wrote the book.

There were evidently several accusations made against Paul. Some had charged that he was fickle in his intent to come to Corinth.

We saw that earlier in II Corinthians 1:17 where he said, 'No, it wasn't with lightness that I said that.'

Some, evidently, made disparaging comments about him personally, that his speech was contemptible and his bodily presence weak. He was not very impressive.

II Corinthians 10:10, "'For his letters,' they say, 'are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible.'" They said, 'Yeah, he sounds pretty impressive when you read those letters, but he's not much to look at.' Some were making disparaging comments of that sort. Some had evidently made allusion to the fact that he perhaps was not really on a par with the other apostles because he really didn't have the authority to take salary or wages from the Churches.

II Corinthians 11:7-9, "Did I commit sin in abasing myself that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you free of charge? I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to minister to you. And when I was present with you, and in need, I was a burden to

no one, for what was lacking to me the brethren who came from Macedonia supplied. And in everything I kept myself from being burdensome to you, and so I will keep myself.”

This, evidently, had been “thrown up” to them. Some of the false apostles had come in and were trying to use that as proof. ‘See, Paul really isn’t an apostle because the others that have come have received salary and livelihood from the Church. Now Paul never did that. You know why he didn’t? He didn’t have that authority.’ Some were trying to twist and distort.

Paul said, ‘I took wages of the other Churches.’ He didn’t take it of Corinth while he was there because of the issue that existed. Their tithes and offerings were used there locally. He didn’t want to be subject to the accusation that he was in it for the money. We saw that some were accusing him of lacking proper credentials.

In II Corinthians 3, there were various accusations that were being leveled against him, none of which were really valid or applied.

II Corinthians 12:14, finally, he ends up telling them, “Now for the third time I am ready to come to you....” Paul says, ‘I am finally coming to you.’

II Corinthians 13:1-2, “This will be the third time I am coming to you. ‘By the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established.’ I have told you before, and foretold as if I were present the second time, and now being absent I write to those who have sinned before, and to all the rest that if I come again I will not spare—.”

Verses 3-4, “since you seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, who is not weak toward you, but mighty in you. For though He was crucified in weakness, yet He lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, but we shall live with Him by the power of God toward you.”

‘I want you to know that when I get there, I am going to see how things are. I hope that I can come in kindness and in gentleness, but if I have to come in power and authority, I will do that.’

Verse 5, “Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Prove yourselves....” ‘Really check yourself out. Are you really what you say you are?’

Verse 11, “Finally brethren, farewell. Become complete. Be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.”

He desired to come in a gentle way, a kind and encouraging way. Yet at the same time, he recognized that there were some very serious

problems that threatened the very existence of the Church, as God’s Church.

There are a lot of things packed into II Corinthians. Paul had to deal with some serious matters as he wrote II Corinthians. Obviously there had been some changes since I Corinthians. Things seemed to have settled out. He wrote this letter, which still had correction in it, but it was more encouraging and not as stern.

Then he came down to Corinth, spent the winter there and left things in a lot better stead. While he was in Corinth, he wrote the book of Romans. He wrote to the Church in Rome, which is what we will go into next time.

Then he left Corinth, going back to Philippi, sailing back to Jerusalem for Pentecost where he was arrested and spent several years in prison. So, things are getting close to that. We will see some of those events next time.